

Kitchen Cabinet “How To”

Structure

Six people with similar job profiles, ideally from different fields/geographies.

Monthly 90 minute meetings, rotating who is the “star” (each person fills the central role ~2x a year), via video conference.

Type of issue or problem the “star” brings to the group:

- something that occupies your time and attention in that moment;
- falls within your sphere of influence;
- resists quick, easy solutions (i.e., not a technical challenge);
- involves your role, style, process as a leader within your organization or community

Whoever is the star one month becomes facilitator/timekeeper for the next month.

Annual Intensive - 1 - 1.5 days in-person.

Monthly Meeting Agenda (90 minutes)

(Optional) In advance, star shares pre-reading/prep materials with others to provide context.

5 mins. **Soft start.**

10 mins. **Set Up Issue/Problem.** Star describes what they hope to discuss. Respondents just listen.

45 mins. **Open, Honest Questions.** Respondents pose questions to the star, following “*Asking Open, Honest Questions*” guidelines attached. (You should “popcorn” across the group – ask when you feel ready, one question at a time – everyone contributes, no one hogs).

15 mins. **Reflections.** The star is silent (on mute) as the respondents reflect on what they heard, what they want to mirror back, potential blind spots, and what they are still wondering. (Each respondent takes 2-3 minutes.)

10 mins. **Response.** The star reflects on what they heard, asks for clarification (if needed), shares what they learned, and what they are taking with them.

5 mins. **Overflow and Housekeeping,** including confirming timekeeper for next time.

Annual Intensive Agenda

Various options, but generally following a similar format as above with time for each person, focused on a larger question or a longer-term issue, for a longer period of time.

Also recommend some form of getting to know you exercise. (Our favorite: teach everyone something you know that is completely unrelated to your job. Props are encouraged!)

This document was created for the Leap Ambassador Gathering, May 2021

Hand-out for Session: “*Fire Your Coach....Get A Kitchen Cabinet*”

Content and methodology gratefully adapted from *The Center for Courage and Renewal*, Parker Palmer's *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, and the Guidelines for *Asking Honest, Open Questions* from the Teaching of our Elders, North Dakota Native American Essential Understandings (NDNAEU) Project.

Guidelines for Asking Honest and Open Questions...

Lessons learned and adapted from Parker Palmer's "A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life", The Center for Courage and Renewal, and the Circle of Trust methodology

...in support of the rule "no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight"—and in support of our intention to help each other listen for inner truth...

- An honest, open question is one you cannot possibly ask while thinking, "I know the right answer to this and I sure hope you give it to me..." Thus, "Have you ever thought about seeing a therapist?" is not an honest, open question. But "What did you learn from the experience you just told us about?" is.
- Try not to get ahead of the presenter's language with your questions. "What did you mean when you said you felt sad?" is an honest, open question. "Didn't you also feel angry?" is not.
- Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with rationales and background materials that allow you to insert your own opinions or advice.
- Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem, questions about the inner realities of the situation as well as the outward facts.
- Ask questions aimed at helping the presenter explore his or her concern rather than satisfying your own curiosity.
- If you have an intuition that a certain question might be useful, even if it seems a bit "off the wall," trust it—once you are reasonably certain that it is an honest, open question. E.g., "What color is this issue for you, and why?"
- If you aren't sure about a particular question, sit with it for a while and wait for clarity.
- As a group, watch the pacing of the questions, allowing some silence between the last answer and the next question. Questions that come too fast may feel aggressive, cutting off the deep reflection that can help the presenter.
- If you have asked one question and heard an answer, you may feel a need to ask a follow-up question. But if you find yourself about to ask the third question in a row before anyone else has had a chance to ask one, don't.
- Avoid questions with yes-no or right-wrong answers. At the same time, remember that the best questions are often simple and straightforward.

Learning to ask honest, open questions is challenging. We may slip occasionally into old "fixing" habits and need forgiveness, from others and from ourselves. As the old saying goes, "Forgive and remember!" and try not to make that particular mistake again. It helps to continually remind ourselves that our purpose in this exercise is not to show what good problem-solvers we are, but simply to support another person in listening to his or her inner teacher.

Adapted from Parker J. Palmer

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Examples: How to Ask Honest, Open Questions

The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner could not possibly know the answer to it...Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person rather than at satisfying your curiosity. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than leading them with background considerations and rationale—which make the question into a speech. Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem, e.g., question about feelings as well as facts. Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if your instinct seems off the wall.

- Parker J. Palmer

Examples of Honest, Open Questions:

How do past experiences inform your current situation?

What image comes to mind as you think about this situation?

How are you feeling as you relate this story?

What color would this situation be?

What would the opposite be...?

How would this be different if...?

Will you say more about (a particular word, phrase, image)...

Is there another aspect...?

What advice might a wise friend give. . .?

What metaphor describes what you are feeling or experiencing?

What led you to say what you just said?

How might that choice play out in your life?

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